

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition



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Healthy behaviors: A day - by - day commitment

Many Americans make New Year's resolutions regarding fitness, healthy eating or both. Almost as many people cannot take advantage of the benefits associated with these lifestyle changes because they give up before reaching their goals. Benefits associated with physical activity and healthy eating include weight management, decreased risk of heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and certain cancers, and improved bone health.

People tend to be busier today than 20, or even 10, years ago. And, American adults are more overweight (68%) today than in the late 1980's and early 1990's (56%). Why? It is easier to be physically inactive than to be physically active. It is more convenient to consume high-calorie, low-nutrient foods from a vending machine or fast-food restaurant than to plan and prepare healthier meals and snacks.

Are you one of many people who is faced with the challenge of making healthy decisions on the go? Does the following scenario sound only too familiar? You are running late for work and do not have time to eat breakfast, so going through the drive-thru seems like a wise decision. A cup of coffee and hash browns do not seem so bad. Oh, but wait, you didn't have time to pack a lunch. That's okay. Grabbing something out of the vending machine will tide you over until dinner. After all, potato chips, cookies, donuts, and a soda will not hurt this one time! As the day goes on, you realize you will be late getting home so going to the gym is out of the question. You grab something quick at a fast-food restaurant so that you can get home to see your favorite TV show. Remember, this is just one day so you can make healthier choices and be physically active tomorrow.

The next day comes and you are off to a late start again. Still, it is only one day. You promise yourself you will do better the next day. However, your "next" day never really comes because it appears you just do not have enough time in the day to act on those healthier decisions. Incorporating physical activity and selecting healthier food items on a daily basis takes true commitment, but not really that much extra time.

It's not too late to commit to making healthier choices, and you can start today by making small changes. For example, have a piece of fruit, low-fat yogurt or string cheese, bagged vegetables, or whole-grains crackers as a mid-morning or afternoon snack. If these items are not available to you during the day, add them to your grocery list so you will have them on hand at home. If you travel during the day, take along non-perishable items such popcorn, dried

fruit or nuts. When going through a drive-thru, opt for a green leafy or fruit salad instead of French fries or onion rings, and low-fat milk instead of soda. Plan time to be physically active for 5-10 minutes two to three days a week. Stand while talking on the phone or during commercial breaks. Over time, try to increase the amount of time and frequency until you are being physically active for at least 30 minutes on most days of the week. Forget about the “all or nothing” rule. If you cannot squeeze 30 continuous minutes of physical activity into your day, do three short 10-minute intervals to total 30 minutes.

Honor your commitment to yourself by identifying the reason(s) for wanting to change a particular behavior. Set personal goals by acknowledging what you want. Make a plan to divide the overall goal into smaller specific goals. List practical steps to achieving those goals and monitor your progress along the way. Be patient as you make gradual lifestyle changes, as you may slip off course once in a while. Re-evaluate your plan(s) and make changes as necessary. Reward yourself for your accomplishments. After all, this is a lifetime commitment, one day at a time, so you might as well start enjoying a lifetime of rewards.

References:

1. Prevalence of Overweight, Obesity, and Extreme Obesity Among Adults: United States, Trends 1976–1980 Through 2007–2008; (accessed 1/14/11): http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/obesity_adult_07_08/obesity_adult_07_08.htm
2. Why healthy habits matter—it’s about you. For you.; <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/healthieryou/html>

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office.
The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet.
To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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